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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000252

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: EU REPS MEET WITH BURMESE PM IN RANGOON

Classified By: COM CARMEN MARTINEZ FOR REASONS 1.5 (B/D).

1. (C) Summary: EU ambassadors resident in Rangoon and Bangkok met recently with the Burmese Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. The EU ambassadors assured COM that the meeting was not for the purpose of delivering any new EU policy message. COM cautioned them that they needed to be extremely careful of letting the regime think it could expand the comfort zone that it has been steadily building with ASEAN, China, and India, into the EU, and urged them not to let the regime spin the meeting as a public show of EU support for the road map or as a follow-on to the "Bangkok Process." The EU reps said that unless there was some significant change in the political circumstances before April 2004 there was no initiative afoot to either soften or harden the EU Common Position. It seems that the EU assemblage was careful not to send the signal that the regime's current "democratization" efforts are being viewed through the same rose-colored glasses worn by ASEAN, China and India. The non-resident EU ambassadors seemed more frustrated with the slow progress and lack of time frame for the road map than those who are resident and used to "SPDC time", especially when it comes to any commitment to the release of ASSK. End Summary.

2. (C) On Monday, February 23, EU ambassadors resident in Rangoon and Bangkok met with Prime Minister Khin Nyunt and Foreign Minister Win Aung. As the FonMin emphasized during the meeting, this was the first time that the PM had met with a group of ambassadors since taking over his new position on August 30 (FYI: in fact, for most, if not all, of the EU ambassadors at the meeting, even those resident in Rangoon, it was the first time they had met with Khin Nyunt in his guise as Secretary 1 or as Prime Minister, except for those few who had met him in a cursory protocol encounter when they presented their credentials. End FYI.)

3. (C) The COM met with the EU ambassadors just prior to their meeting with the PM. The COM urged the assembled group to be very careful not to let the regime spin the meeting with the PM as a show of EU support for the road map or as a follow-on to the "Bangkok Process." The EU reps assured the COM that the meeting was not for the purpose of delivering any new EU policy message. The COM also cautioned them to be extremely careful of letting the regime think it could expand the comfort zone that it has been steadily building with ASEAN, China, and India into the EU. The EU reps also said that, unless there was some significant change in the political circumstances before April 2004, there was no initiative afoot to either soften or harden the EU Common Position.

4. (C) The EU reps said they were taking advantage of the presence of the assembled group to discuss the possibility of establishing an office of the European Commission for Humanitarian Assistance (ECHO) in Rangoon to oversee EU funded humanitarian projects that are already underway in Burma (FYI: It seems that many EU Ambassadors are unhappy with the lack of input they have on project funding/management as it is all managed, in a somewhat high-handed manner, by the head of the European Commission in Bangkok. End FYI). When the opportunity to meet with the PM came up, of course they had to take advantage of it.

5. (C) The hour long meeting was mainly taken up with a 55 minute monologue by the PM on the cultural and political history of Burma. However, as the PM arrived at "current events" he did say that "everybody, and I mean everybody" will be included in the National Convention. However, the FonMin, in an unusually bold (for the FonMin) intervention, corrected the PM to say that "everybody that is eligible to participate will participate." The PM also said that the National Convention would probably be convened in fall 2004.

6. (C) As the PM brought the meeting to a close, the Dutch ambassador (the EU rep in Bangkok) was able to claim five minutes to make a few points. He stated that the EU was waiting to see what results the road map brings before passing judgment. He also expressed EU support for Special Envoy Razali and urged that the regime allow Razali to return and carry out his mandate soon. He emphasized that the National Convention could only be viable with the participation of the democratic opposition and the ethnic groups.

17. (C) The Dutch ambassador also asked the PM to clarify a recent statement attributed to Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra that Aung San Suu Kyi would be released from house arrest in October, 2004. The PM did not give a definitive response, saying instead "I am doing everything possible." EU reps commented that at least the PM did not try to continue the regime's farce that ASSK is not under house arrest.

18. (C) COM was able to corroborate much of the readout of the meeting later that evening in a conversation with the FonMin at the Brunei National Day Reception. The FonMin, in fact, gave COM a very slightly condensed version of the history monologue and repeated that "everybody that is eligible to participate will participate."

19. (C) Participating in the meeting with the PM were ambassadors of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Slovakia, Spain, and the Delegation of the European Commission (all eight resident in Bangkok), along with the ambassadors of Germany, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom (resident in Rangoon). The Irish ambassador-designate (accredited and resident in Malaysia) was also present for the EU meeting on ECHO operations and for the COM's meeting with EU reps. However, as Ireland has not formalized diplomatic relations with the GOB he did not attend the meeting with the PM (FYI: Irish ambassador told COM he was excluded due to some bumbling but was told the following day, at his meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Khin Maung Win, that the PM had been "expecting him" along with the other EU reps. End FYI.)

10. (C) Comment: It seems that the EU assemblage was careful not to send the signal that the regime's current "democratization" efforts are being viewed through the same rose-colored glasses worn by ASEAN, China and India. The regime has not tried to reap any particular PR benefits from this meeting as press coverage has been minimal. The non-resident EU ambassadors seemed more frustrated with the slow progress and lack of time frame for the road map than those who are resident and used to "SPDC time", especially when it comes to any commitment to the release of ASSK. End Comment.  
Martinez